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Higher Education in Transformation
Conference, Ontario, 2016

2016

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Eileen Quinn

Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown, Eileen.quinn@itb.ie

Olivia Edge

Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown

Sharon Feeney

Technological University Dublin, sharon.feeney@tudublin.ie

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Recommended Citation

Quinn, E., Edge, E., & Feeney, S. (2016) An Approach to Designing Services in a Technological University: Re-engineering or Seduction? *Higher Education in Transformation Symposium*, Oshawa, Ontario, Canada, , November 2-6.

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DESIGNING SERVICES: RE-ENGINEERING OR SEDUCTION?

An Approach to Designing Services in a Technological University:

Re-engineering or Seduction?

Eileen Quinn

Olivia Edge

Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown, Ireland

Sharon Feeney

Dublin Institute of Technology, Ireland

Presented at the Higher Education in Transformation Symposium

November 2 - 4, 2016 in Oshawa, Ontario, Canada

Abstract

This paper is written in the context of three Irish higher education institutions negotiating a merger in order to become Ireland's inaugural 'Technological University'. To be designated as a technological university (TU), the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), Institute of Technology Tallaght (ITT) and Institute of Technology Blanchardstown (ITB) are first required to merge and to then transform how they approach and deliver education and the services that support it.

As envisioned at the time of writing this paper, the agreed characteristics of the TU include being agile, flexible and deeply responsive to its stakeholders. The internal environment in all three institutions were seen as being unsupportive of the characteristics, in that they are bureaucratic and replete with mechanistic thinking. Furthermore, the merger environment was highly ambiguous, uncertain and unpredictable, with no single leader yet in place to navigate the institutions towards a single university designation. In this world, change wasn't happening in a proactive way – rather, it had to be seduced.

In this study, an experimental approach to entice into existence newly designed student-related services in the TU was trialled. The context gives a nod towards the mechanistic structures, but recognises the need for some planning whilst at the same time leaving considerable scope for 'the new' to emerge. These services, as envisioned, will be personal and relational in orientation, and premised on staff engaging authentically with students to ensure a singular student experience is created in all three institutions.

The design of the study comprised a series of mini-projects. Staff were released to work on these on inter-institute teams of 6-8 people for short concentrated periods. With minimal

advance planning, the authors of this paper went live with two mini-projects – utilising a *‘Leap then Look’* approach.

Underpinning this rhizomatic structure, the authors sought to create within the small teams, an embodied experience of the messiness of change as they initiated a move towards becoming a flexible, agile and responsive organisation. In addition to working collaboratively, the ‘experience’ offered teams a taste of ‘safe uncertainty’ (Mason, 1993), a feeling of being empowered to create something new, of being shaken from their comfort zone, and of taking on a challenge with ‘just enough’ support. The assertion of this study is that by embodying such experiences, change moves from being a process-driven re-engineering project towards a people-driven seduction activity.

In formulating this approach, we drew from a combination of Gestalt principles, complexity thinking and adult psychological development theory.

To assess the impact of our approach, we evaluated it through post-project reflection and dialogue with all participants. We have discovered so far that something new is emerging. Our findings suggest that when the experience contains an element of high challenge combined with high support, change happens more organically and creates a demand for more. It is spontaneous and energy generating, in contrast to imposed change that is often described as being disconnected, stuck and energy depleting.

This initiative is counter-cultural. It is team-paced and still in early stages of development. Thus it remains to be seen whether it will be amplified into a broad change management

approach over time or if it will regress back towards the status quo. This will be a learning focus in the next phase of our work.

This study has implications for those involved in organisation wide change in a higher education context (or any other policy-driven context). It shows that through ongoing experimentation we can come to understand our territory and deepen our capability of participation in the unfolding reality of an evolving environment. The challenge for leaders revolves around creating and sustaining an eco-system for such learning to happen.

Keywords: Ireland, student services, design, higher education, study, organisational change, storytelling, technological university

An Approach to Designing Services in a Technological University:

Re-engineering or Seduction?

Introduction

This paper reviews an approach to organisation design in the area of front line student services in a new type of university in Ireland. Three higher education institutions in Dublin have formed an alliance to form Ireland's first Technological University, namely Institute of Technology Blanchardstown (ITB), Institute of Technology Tallaght (ITT), and the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT). The three institutions have agreed to merge to form the largest higher education institution in Ireland, with a total student enrolment in excess of 30,000 students. This paper focuses on the organisation development and change process undertaken for those involved in the provision of front line services for students, and includes outcomes generated by staff participants from each of the three institutions.

This paper serves to provide a record of the organisation design process that took place during the two-year period between early 2015 through to the end of 2016, for staff involved in front line services. The broader organisational development and change process still continues in the three institutions and is likely going to continue well beyond any merger that may take place in the future.

Context

The Irish higher education sector has seen significant reform in recent years (Feeney, 2014, p. 15). Of particular interest to this paper is the 'National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030' which was published in 2011 (see Feeney, 2014, p. 15; Feeney, Edge & Quinn, 2015, p. 2). This strategy proposed the establishment of Technological Universities (TU) in Ireland and further proposed that some Institutes of Technology might be in a position to apply for TU status after having undergone a process of consolidation and merger (Feeney, Edge & Quinn, 2015, p. 2). It is in this context that the Dublin Institute of

Technology (DIT), ITT Dublin and the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown (ITB) agreed to merge and collaboratively transform how they approach and deliver higher education in the most efficient and effective way possible. The organisation design process team had clarified at an early stage that the characteristics of a TU would include being agile, flexible and deeply responsive to multiple stakeholders (See Feeney, Edge & Quinn, 2015). This presented a unique challenge to all three institutions, which are currently characterised by bureaucratic systems and replete with mechanistic processes. The internal environment in all three institutions are unsupportive of the substantive change process that must be undertaken in order to achieve the characteristics. Furthermore, the statutory environment regarding the merger remains ambiguous, uncertain and unpredictable, due to political and economic instability in Ireland in recent years. In this context, organisational change has not happened readily, but rather, participants had to be seduced into participating in the process of designing student facing service provision mechanisms.

This paper will describe an experimental approach to the design of new student-related services for the emerging TU, which was created through working with the three existing, independent service operations. This approach was co-created and was a product of the participation of all services personnel who were involved, including three organisation design facilitators (the authors of this paper). The aim of this paper is to share the story of progress made to date with a wider audience, with the clear understanding that we are doing so on behalf of all who participated in this part of the organisational design process.

Designing a New Organisation – Organisation Change

Higher education institutions, like most social institutions, are by-products of their circumstances. Therefore, the missions, rationales, strategies and organisation designs can never be completely disentangled from their place, their time, their history, their society, their region, and their culture (Johnson, 2007; Stinchcombe, 1965). Indeed, many studies have

shown that the conditions in which organisations are founded impose a pervasive and consistent influence on their character, that remains long after the conditions that gave rise to it disappeared, thereby often leaving organisations growth to be less meaningful and ill-adapted to the evolving and emerging external environment over time (Baum & Oliver, 1996; Hannan & Freeman, 1989). Thus, organisations need to be flexible, adaptive, agile and responsive to stakeholder needs. This requires higher education institutions to be cognisant of who their stakeholders are and how best to meet their needs.

Traditional approaches to change emphasise the importance of specifying a desired end state and devising a plan which sets out how to achieve it. This assumes that individuals in an organisation are capable of identifying the desired end state and a set of actions, which if implemented, will achieve it. These approaches are largely informed by a mechanistic view of organisations, “a belief that they are bounded systems where relatively simple relationships of cause and effect operate between relatively sovereign individuals” (Critchley, King & Higgins, 2007, p. 50). The working assumption about change is that process and structural change will result in people behaving differently and therefore produce different results. Frequently, such change is initiated or ‘driven’ from the top and responsibility for devising and/or implementing the plan is assigned to an individual or a project team whose progress is then objectively measured. Where progress cannot be achieved according to plan, often the approach is to seek out where the resistance to change might be in the organisation and confront it or root it out. Although such approaches can be useful in relatively stable environments and in situations characterised by low ambiguity and uncertainty, they do not reflect how change occurs in contexts other than these.

In the complex, unpredictable, ambiguous and uncertain environment of the TU, a different approach was preferred. This is one that recognised the emergent, disruptive, and messy aspects of change that co-exist alongside the ordered, stable and ordinary aspects:

Together, these constitute the lived reality of change. This lived reality is one which assumes that people behaving differently and producing different results will result in identifying the need for both processual and structural change. It also recognises that there is a need to seduce active participation rather than re-engineer change for it to have meaningful and lasting impact.

In this study, which focuses on designing student-related services for the TU, we used a participative approach that is minimally steered from the top of the organisation. The approach seeks to use the knowledge and experience of everyone involved in services to build the new TU-wide services from best practice of what is already seen to be working well in the three Institutions. While the ‘pragmatic’ thing to do might be to simply subsume services delivered in ITB and ITT into DIT’s existing model (given the fact that DIT is much larger than the other institutions combined), those involved recognise that ‘pragmatic’ can sometimes be a label for ‘taking the easy way out’. Consequently, in this instance, participants chose to tackle the substantive question directly - what student-related services will the diverse mix of future TU students need and, as a unified entity, how do we best deliver them?

Approach

The overall approach taken is underpinned by a complexity perspective of organisations and informed by a fusion of Gestalt principles and adult mental development theory. From a complexity perspective, organisations are depicted as “complex responsive processes of relating, that is, human beings interacting with each other in a series of gestures and responses – no more and no less than that” (Stacey, 2011). This assumes that cause and effect are largely unknowable, and the main currency of organising is the communicative interactions between people (Critchley, King & Higgins, 2007). Complexity perspective also assumes that identity and meaning will emerge through these interpersonal interactions. Thus,

there is no such thing as the autonomous individual, because individual characters and identities only exist in the context of their relationships with others.

This approach focuses on relationships, both formal and informal, and to patterns of communication between people as they go about doing their work. Changes in structures and procedures are only a small part of a change process, and the real work lies in engaging with the informal processes, the ways that people come together and go about their business in a variety of non-prescribed and unpredictable ways (Critchley, et al., 2007). Since there is no bounded and rational whole, no inside or outside to consider, it means that to bring about substantive change in an organisation you can start anywhere. It also means that change is best approached with a spirit of openness, since any final destination will depend in part on what we discover, learn and create along the way.

The approach taken in this study is unique to Irish higher education institutions to date. Therefore, further elucidation is deemed necessary to better understand the process undertaken to create student-related services for the TU. Arising from our study, a cohesive purpose for student-related services was articulated, and an initial series of mini-projects was completed. Work on the next set of projects is currently underway. For the purpose of this paper, in the next section we describe:

- how a cohesive purpose for student-related services was developed;
- how mini-design teams, charged with designing the new TU services were established and operated; and
- our learnings and insights gained to date from the work undertaken.

Towards the Development of a cohesive purpose for student related services

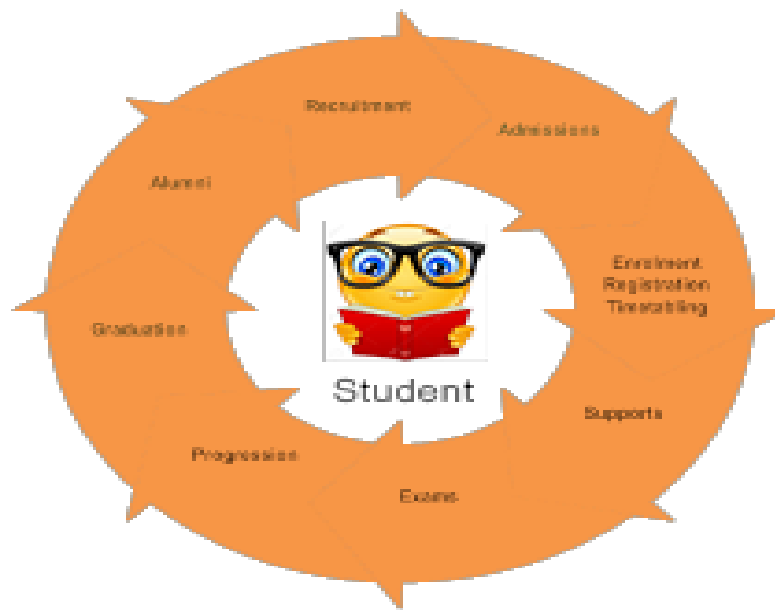


Figure 1. The cycle of student-related services

Student-related services comprises all of the services a student will interact with during their time in the TU. It encompasses the services that undertake targeting and recruitment of potential students, right through to those that address the needs of alumni, and everything in between (Figure 1, above). For this approach, these services were viewed as an integrated whole, operating within a larger-scale organisational whole. Doing so brings attention to the interconnectedness of service provision. This is important since the students' service experience is likely to be coloured by the pattern of interactions of the people delivering the elements of a service, as well as those providing services at the intersections within the organisation.

Focusing on the whole organisational level services provision directed attention to the need to articulate the overarching purpose of student-related services within the TU. This purpose was to be framed within the higher level vision of a TU that would embrace the core characteristics of being agile, flexible and deeply responsive to stakeholders. From a complexity perspective this means that individuals needed to interact with one another and

with students in an agile, flexible and responsive way as they go about the business of designing and delivering services. Adopting this approach as a guiding principle for the design of our study highlighted a need to involve all student-related services staff, student representatives, and other internal stakeholders in the design process, commencing with the need of articulating a single, unambiguous, clear purpose.

The process leading up to the articulation of this single purpose comprised two stages. Stage one comprised Storytelling Coffee Mornings and stage two comprised a Storytellers Convention.

Process

Stage 1: Storytelling Coffee Mornings

In the first stage, a series of storytelling coffee mornings were held. The purpose of these events was to forge connections among people across the three institutions, most of whom did not know one another. Over coffee and scones in a restaurant environment, participants were invited to work in pairs and exchange stories of '*wonderfully satisfying service moments*'. These were identified as being moments when great service was delivered to the student whilst also being wonderfully satisfying for the person/s involved in providing it. These stories were recorded and the components that really energised the individuals were distilled from them.

The choice of story topic recognises the reciprocal aspect of services, that good service is sustained when there is mutual benefit for both the provider and recipient. Focusing attention on what is already happening, the 'what is', draws upon the theory that it is only by truly heightening awareness of the present that change can occur (Beisser, 1970). In other words, it is only by first staying with the familiar that sufficient safety is created to enable someone risk an encounter with the new or unfamiliar. Attending to the 'best' of 'what is', goes a step further, however, and brings in an appreciative inquiry (AI) approach

(Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987, p. 129; Bushe, 1995, p. 14). This involves looking out for what we want more of, i.e., wonderfully satisfying service moments, and then taking action to amplify and encourage more of these (Bushe, 2001). Essentially, it utilises a strengths-based approach.

Through the telling of individual stories, a bigger story of everyday happenings in student-related services was told, a story of kind words, listening ears and good-hearted action. This served to highlight the efforts people make on a daily basis to assist individual students; efforts that contribute significantly to student retention, but their importance rarely being acknowledged since they are largely invisible to the wider organisation.

Stage 2: Storyteller's Convention

In the second stage, a large *Storyteller's Convention* was hosted to which all services staff, student representatives and other internal stakeholders were invited. At this convention, key themes/strengths were identified, using the individual coffee-morning stories as the initial foundation.

To create conditions for innovation and surprise, the *Convention* was loosely structured. The intent behind this was to provide sufficient structure to contain anxiety yet allow enough freedom for something novel to emerge on the day. In addition to connecting people who do not usually meet, a second but deeper intent was to enable interaction and conversation between people across the three institutes, but to avoid any attempt to predetermine any outcome. This was consistent with complexity thinking, specifically the belief that whatever emerges does not 'pre-exist', but rather, is co-created as people interact with one another.

From the key themes and strengths identified, participants then crafted images and bookmarks depicting key characteristics of services in the TU (see Figure 2 overleaf).

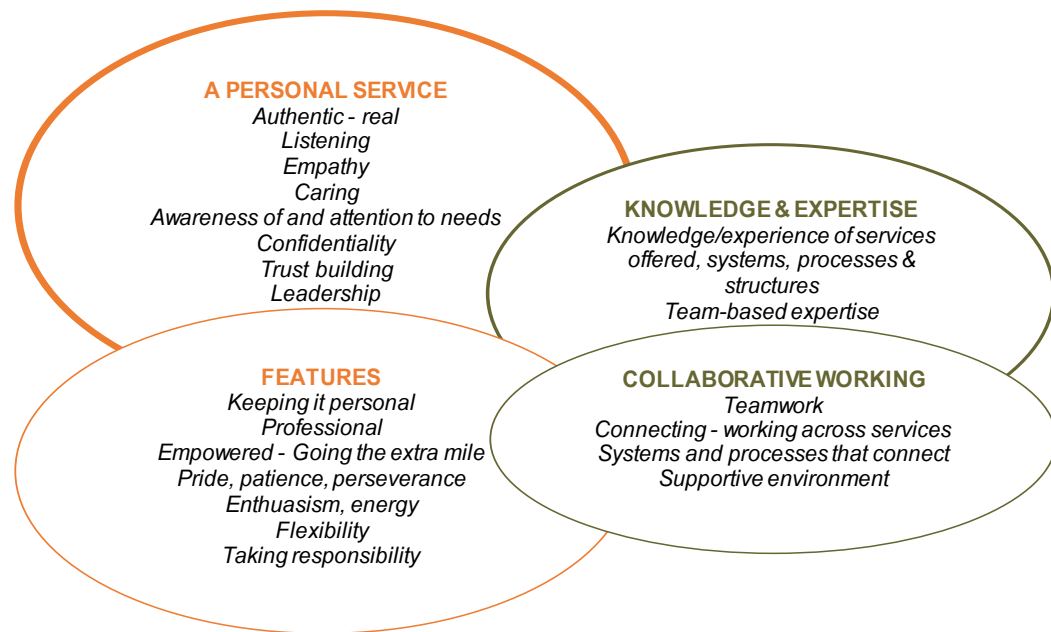


Figure 2. Characteristics of the TU Service Offering to students

In summary form they depicted a service that would be characterised as being:

- Personal and relational (*engaging and genuine*);
- Motivated by a desire to attend to the well-being of the ‘person’ that is the student; and
- Personal, caring and proactive in supporting the student throughout their education life.

The tag line ‘*bringing your heart to work*’ became the ‘glue’ that holds these characterisations together for participants.

The personal, relational orientation is premised on staff engaging authentically with students. It was enabled through those involved (i) having appropriate knowledge, experience and expertise and (ii) being well supported by processes of collaborative working. This orientation is extremely important given the increasing diversity of the TU student cohort, the need to understand what services students require at each point in their academic journey, and the appropriate service intervention that might be required. To optimise the use of resources, a design that can address the needs of a multiplicity of students is required, signalling a need to abide by the principles of universal design in the overall design process.

Taking this personal relational approach, a cohesive purpose for Services has since been articulated, which is to make a concrete difference in the lives of all TU students, regardless of which physical location they attend.

This cohesive purpose proposes a different approach that should, when applied:

- positively impact retention and thereby contribute financially to the TU;
- through word-of-mouth exchanges of positive service experiences, help to build the new TU's reputation and thereby support the student recruitment effort; and
- reflect a unique, defining characteristic of the new TU, which is to work in an engaging way with all stakeholders, particularly students.

Once the purpose was articulated, attention then moved to creating an organisation design component for student services that would be best suited to this.

Establishment and Operation of Mini-design Teams

For this stage, we adopted an experimental approach, quickly going live with a services design project entitled '*Communicating with TU Students*'. The overall approach could be described as '*Leap then Look*' (Chapman, 2014). The short lead time between idea and action contained an unspoken encouragement to everyone involved to become a little braver when it comes to experimenting.

The overall structure of this activity could be considered to be rhizomatic (see Figure 3 overleaf). A rhizome is a horizontal, underground plant stem, capable of producing the shoot and root systems of a new plant (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Using rhizome as a metaphor, a single services project could produce multiple projects/ mini-projects as could a single mini-project. Thus, the structure evolves as needs emerge and can cover many or single needs, depending on requirements.

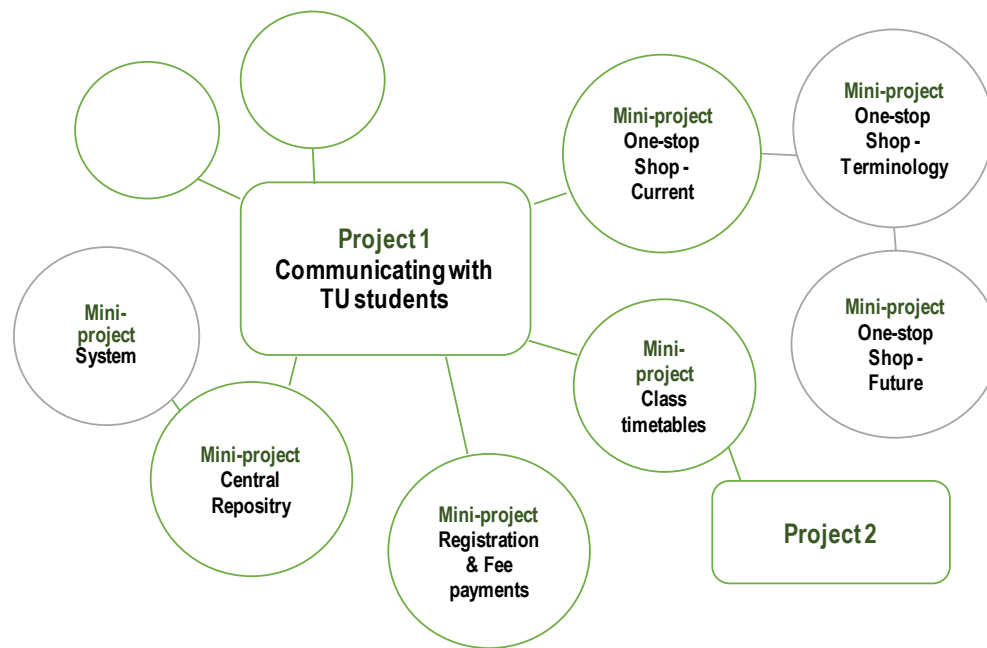


Figure 3. A rhizomatic structure

The project selected was sub-divided into a series of smaller, ‘bite-sized’ mini-projects that were then scoped out by teams which comprised one person from each institution with the requisite knowledge and experience. Members of the scoping team addressing communications pertaining to enrolment and fee payments, for example, were all familiar with what this involved in their institute.

Scoping teams were briefed as follows:

- The work scoped should be of a scale that can be completed by a team of 6-8 people in a five day period.
- The scoping document should specify a number of essential requirements, notably that the mini-design team appointed is required to:
 - ◇ Design from the student’s perspective – what would meet the student’s needs
 - ◇ Design for the TU, drawing from the best of what already exists in the three institutes;
 - ◇ Engage others in the design who have a stake in this aspect of the service; and
 - ◇ Incorporate external perspectives and practices to the greatest extent possible.

When the scoping was complete, a mini-design team was then established to design that aspect of the service. Eight mini-projects were initially scoped and two were chosen to ‘go

live' in the initial phase, using these to work out the process. The design teams were drawn from across the three institutions. Teams comprised 6–8 people, selected on the basis of knowledge and expertise, rather than their seniority or position title. Consequently, the composition of teams was diverse. In certain instances, members of the scoping team subsequently became members of the mini-design team. This provided continuity and was viewed as valuable by the teams, as we later learned. Over time, the intent was that everyone involved in delivering student-related services would participate on at least one mini-design team.

An overview of the entire process is set out in *Figure 4* overleaf. The methods chosen during this period were heavily informed by the desired characteristics of student-related services as described earlier. The services as envisioned were brought to life *in* the here and now of people interacting as they created them rather than *after* the event as an output or end product. This created an energy and excitement about the project that would be difficult to replicate through other methods. The ownership of all outputs created was shared by all participants and the final outputs were consequently accepted with no disagreement. This was a significant outcome, given the ultimate goal of establishing an organisation design that would be '*fit for purpose*' and accepted by staff in all three institutions. By putting the service delivery ideals to the forefront of the purpose, intent and outcomes, all staff were focussed only on service provision, not on individual career paths, organisation-specific roles and rules, and not on any organisational level political manoeuvring.

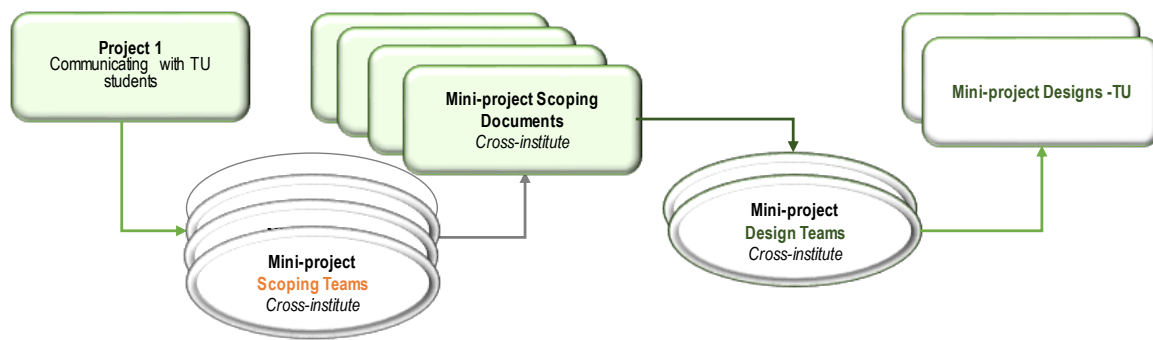


Figure 4. Process overview – Designing TU student-related services

The links between desired service characteristics and the criteria used to choose methods by the participants are illustrated *Figure 5*, below.

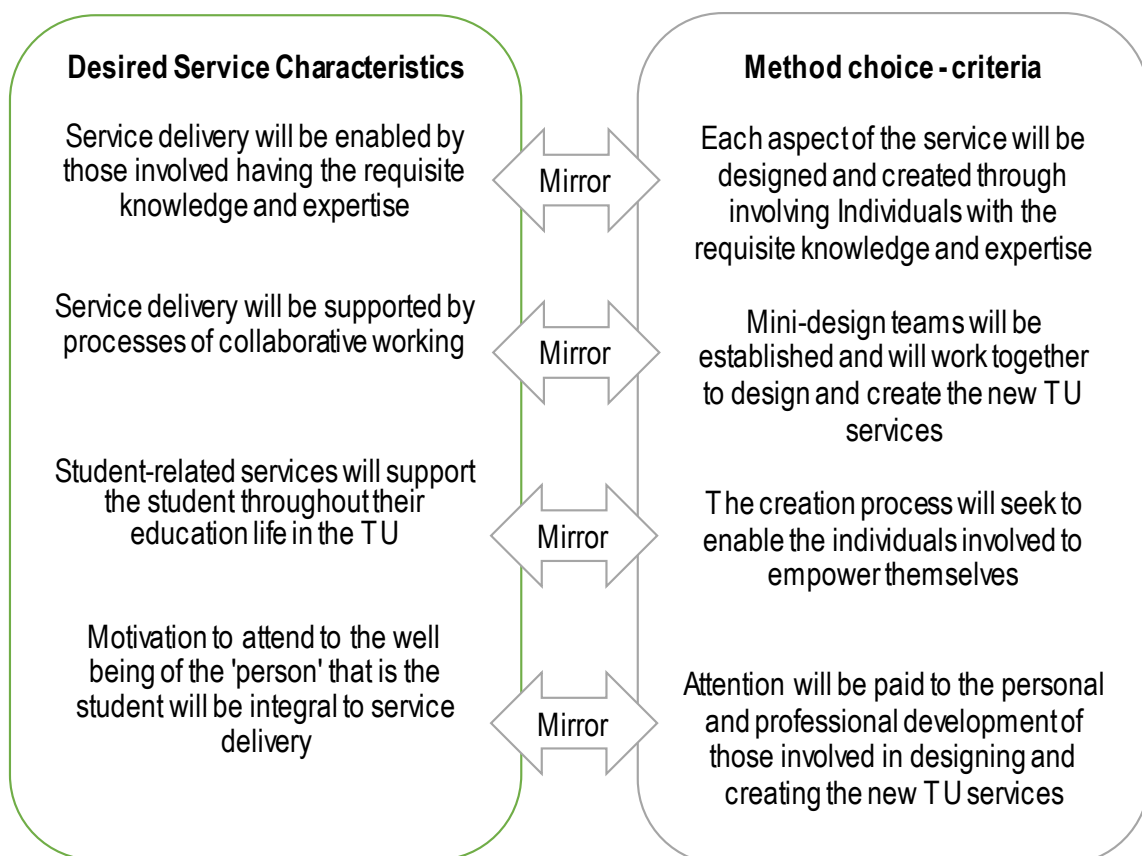


Figure 5. Link between desired student-related service characteristics & criteria for selecting methods

The first two characteristics that were agreed, that service delivery will be (1) enabled by those involved having the requisite knowledge and expertise, and (2) supported by processes of collaborative working, resulted, as already mentioned, in the creation of small mini-design teams comprising services people with a deep familiarity of a specific aspect of a service. The third characteristic, that student-related services will support the student throughout their education life in the TU, resulted in selecting methods that would help members of the mini-design teams to empower themselves whilst engaged in the work underway. This led to the ‘live initiation’, a process created to provide high support to the teams in conditions of high challenge. This is described in further detail below. The live initiation, combined with participation in a mini-design team, also sought to address the need to pay attention to the professional and personal development of participants, all of whom are service providers. This mirrored the fourth service characteristic, that of attending to the well-being of the ‘person’ that is the student, and recognises the importance of reciprocity in service provision.

The ‘live initiation’

Once the mini-design team was named, those involved were released for five working days to work up a specific small, integral part of the actual design. To facilitate this work, one team completed the design in a five-day block, while the other team split the time into two or three day blocks. At the outset, each team separately participated in a ‘live initiation’ comprising three components – individual and team development, project management, and process mapping.

In the delivery phase, each component was tailored to the team’s needs and guided by the requirement set out in the scoping document provided to them. The level of support and input was dependent upon the nature of the work and the stated needs of team members. The mini-projects were considered to be very challenging by those participating, so the intent

behind the initiation was to provide concentrated support initially, reducing this to an ‘on demand’ facility as the team’s confidence and capability increased. The hope for each team was that members would be good company for each other on the journey to build the new TU services, and in doing so they might also refresh and build themselves.

More specifically, in the initiation, a strengths-based approach was used and each team member was encouraged to bring their experiences and insights into the development of new student-related services. Attention was given to the development of transferable skills including teamwork, personal profiling and reflection, project management, and process mapping and members were encouraged to pursue their own personal development. Use of dialogue was emphasised to initiate attitude-changing effects into the team, moving beyond an exchange of information, or imposing individual points of view, to a shared understanding of what was needed for the future. The initiation was guided jointly by a team facilitator and a project management/process mapping expert. The Tuckman stages of team development (Tuckman, 1965) was used as a framework to guide the teams through a series of questions (see Appendix A) which they addressed in the context of their team and the brief assigned to them.

Through participation in a mini-design team, the intent was to give team members an embodied experience of the messiness of the organisational change process, as movement towards being a flexible, agile and responsive service occurs. In addition to working collaboratively, it was hoped that the ‘experience’ would offer team members a taste of ‘safe uncertainty’ (Mason, 1993), a feeling of being empowered to create something new, of being shaken from their comfort zone, and of taking on a challenge with ‘just enough’ support.

Findings: Learnings and Insights

On completion of the first two mini-projects, a review of each team was conducted separately, focusing on their experience of participating in a team, the outputs produced, and

on learnings identified for further consideration. These were rich and enlivening conversations, from which a number of recurrent themes emerged.

‘It was hard work’ and ‘we enjoyed it’

Overall, team members spoke about how much they had enjoyed the experience. Many spoke of their initial apprehension upon joining a team and feeling daunted by what was expected of them. The live initiation and the support of the group facilitator, and the project management/process mapping expertise greatly helped. While the work was hard and time-pressured, they had lots of fun and were eager to move forward and do more. For all participants, it was non-routine work, so participants found it to be demanding and stretching. Added to that, participants did not know one another and so had to find a way to work together in a collaborative way in order to get the job done. However, participants mentioned how positive and constructive their interactions were, and from observation there was evidence of good psychological contact between team members. In general, the teams demonstrated that they were highly energised as they spoke about their experience.

‘We all had something the other wanted’

By focusing on the student - what did the student need or what was the best way to deliver a service from the student’s perspective? – the team members described how they were able to navigate and resolve any issues of institutional hierarchy that arose. Many spoke about being mindful of others and of taking care not to dominate or assert that their institute’s way of doing something was the best way. Using the student experience as a lens, they each discovered that their institute had something – a process, a system, or a mechanism – that the others viewed as being desirable. Participants described how *‘ideas came from anyone, and all were considered’*. At the conclusion of the exercise, the output produced appeared to be a blending of all three institutions practice, yet with added ingredients blended in.

‘We did it’

The teams expressed pride in what they had produced and openly spoke about being pleased with themselves and their accomplishments. They found the work ‘messy’ and reported that it took lots of discussion, thinking and working through. Participants had to get to grips with systems and processes in each of the three institutes as well figure out the knowledge and expertise each person had to bring to each task. In addition, they had to talk about the merger of the three institutions, particularly how they might handle the integration of three systems in light of how they ultimately wanted to deliver the service to the TU student. Despite these issues, participants delivered an output that was regarded as being significant to each of them.

‘We felt empowered’

One of the interesting observations, was that both teams worked throughout the period as they had begun during the initiation, sitting in a circle, paying little attention to hierarchy and engaging in dialogue. Individuals voluntarily took up roles based on their individual strengths. So Mary-1 did the ‘time-keeping’ and Joe-2 came in early the second day and ‘*put up a list of the three things we had to do first*’. It seems they picked up the tools they’d been offered, worked in an autonomous, self-directed manner, and empowered themselves. This approach ignored the hierarchical structure (or seniority) of staff positions, rather, each participant was seen as being equal with a valuable contribution being made by all participants.

‘The facilities worked’

Team members spoke of appreciating the small things provided during the sessions, like tea/coffee, scones and sandwiches. As this is not the norm in the Irish public sector, the message it carried was that of caring for and valuing people. This unanticipated appreciation highlights the importance of hygiene factors in the work environment.

Both teams delivered what was required within the time-frame, far exceeding expectations of what could be accomplished. This took everybody by surprise. They identified the support of their managers as being an important enabler, not simply through releasing them to participate, but by knowing that they were supportive of the process. In general terms, the process worked for those who participated. Participants expressed appreciation for being able to actively participate in creating the new TU services, and being involved in changes that will impact upon them, both personally and professionally. They welcomed the idea that an equivalent opportunity would be extended to their colleagues in due course.

Some of the recommendations they offered included:

- ◇ Greater clarity about how the outputs will feed into the next organisation design steps
- ◇ Establishing a mechanism for sharing outputs with the greater services community
- ◇ Always having one member of the scoping team on the mini-design team
- ◇ Allowing an additional period for completion of quality checks

Drawing In

The approach outlined in this study can be considered to be counter-cultural in a number of respects. Firstly, it seeks to involve *everybody* in student-related services and to engage extensively with students and other internal stakeholders, where the norm is to involve only a few, usually via the establishment of a dedicated project team. In so doing, it seeks to embrace the messiness of change rather than try and tidy it away. There is no grand plan, but rather the approach seeks to create a space for whatever needs to be done to emerge. It encourages experimentation and bravery in a public service culture that is increasingly rule-bound and safety conscious. It places trust in people and their capacities, irrespective of their grade or position, where normally this is dictated by hierarchy and seniority. It recognises what is ordinarily denied, that is, that while someone may be in charge, no one is ever in control, as stability and change are always self-organising in patterned but unpredictable ways. Finally, this study acknowledges that change occurs at the local level in

what happens when people talk together, work on a team together, or make choices about things in the here and now. Change doesn't need to be tightly planned with hard boundaries around steps, stages, and activities. The experience of talking, working and collaborating serves to build longer term alliances and respect amongst participants, thereby facilitating trust building and capacity sharing between the three institutions.

Being counter-cultural means this approach carries a high risk of either not gaining traction or of ideas and thoughts being dampened towards a status quo, instead of being amplified into a broad scale change effort in the nature and provision of student-related services. At this stage of the process, it is still too early to tell which way it will go. Those who have been involved are positive and believe it can work, which is immensely helpful. However, we know from past experience that new ways of working are oftentimes fragile and need nurturing, so this means that in our next steps we need to pay attention to creating protected spaces in order to mitigate against the potential risks involved.

As an experiment, this study has implications for those involved in change in a higher education setting. It shows that through experimentation we come to understand our territory and deepen our capacity for participating in the unfolding reality of the emergent environment. The challenge for leaders revolves around the challenge of creating and sustaining the environment for such learning to happen. Like the 'Ugly Duckling', the approach has the potential to become a 'swan-like' catalyst for the TU, but it is impossible to predict at this point in the merger negotiations. Instead, we can keep this as a live question and remain hopeful that collectively and collaboratively, through seduction rather than re-engineering, we can entice the changes required for the TU into being.

Conclusion

This paper reviewed part of an organisation development and change process which was undertaken for those involved in the provision of front line services for students in three

independent and autonomous institutions, prior to an institutional merger. The main purpose of the paper was to provide a record of the organisation design process that took place during the two-year period between the beginning of 2015 through to the end of 2016, for staff involved in front line services, prior to any formal merger being undertaken. The broader organisational development and change process continues in the three institutions and is likely going to continue well beyond any merger that may take place in the future. However, the findings from the study presented in this paper will seek to inform and influence how services are delivered to students in the newly formed TU.

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Appendix A

‘Live initiation’ - Questions to be addressed by the mini-project Design Teams*(adapted from Tuckman (1965))***Stage 1: Forming**

- **Who** are we?
- What is our **Goal**? What do we want to achieve as a team? What binds us?
 - What is our Goal?
 - How will we work together?
 - What will the completed goal look like?
 - What Judgments are required for us to be effective?
- What are our **Strengths**? Assigning roles for each stage of the mini-project life cycle in accordance with strengths and the provision of opportunities to learn and develop.
 - Leadership – Planning the team strategy
 - Knowledge Experts – Mapping out the current practices
 - Innovation and Creativity – Ideas for doing things smarter
 - People relationships – balance of harmony and challenge
 - Results/Follow through/how to handover to the TU4D?
 - What **Mindset** will build team effectiveness?
 - Growth mindsets vs fixed mindsets (Dweck, 2006)
 - What **Values** will we live by?
 - What culture and values do we want to live by in our team?

Stage 2: Storming

- How will we manage this mini-project?
 - What is the scope of our project?
 - What timescales are we working to?
 - What are our Costs? Time and Effort required? Resources? Input from others?
 - What quality of work is expected from us?
 - Who do we consult outside the team? Research. Stakeholders.
 - What are our Risks?
 - Who do we have contracts with?
 - How will we give/receive constructive feedback to each other?
 - What Expectations will we have of our Mentor? What expectations will they have of us?
 - How often do we communicate to stakeholders?
 - Are we ready to go to the next phase of team development (performing)?
 - Is there anything we have forgotten or is holding us back?
 - How will we review and reflect on our work as a team regularly?

Stage 3: Norming

- How will we map current processes
- What technical enablers do we need, e.g. Ghant charts, Project Charters

Stage 4: Performing

- How will we map new processes?

Stage 5: Adjourning

- What needs to happen for the team before we finish?
- What are next steps?